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ABSTRACT

This document describes seven projects based on research-based strategies to educate students with emotional and/or behavioral problems and prevent their dropping out of high school. An introduction notes that all the projects focus on forming new connections using multi-pronged approaches to meet individual students' basic emotional and social needs. A chart compares the projects in terms of strategies (such as relationship building, social skills training, and family involvement), community settings (urban, suburban, or rural), or school settings (middle school, high school, or alternative setting). Individual case examples are included with each project description. The projects are: (1) Supportive Schools Model (University of Kansas) which stresses academic training; (2) Project Serve (University of Oregon) which provides academic and vocational training; (3) Amazing Discoveries (Arizona State University) which embeds social skills lessons into hands-on experiments about human behavior; (4) Mentor/Advisor Project (University of Vermont) which stresses relationship building with peers and adults; (5) Check & Connect (University of Minnesota) which focuses on relationship building; (6) Laulima Lokahi (University of Hawaii) which emphasizes community partnerships; and (7) the Community Transition Program (University of Oregon) which is organized around involvement of social service agencies. (DB)

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"I am the one people expect less of, the under-achiever, the dropout. I am the one who had to go against all stereotypes, mean and dirty looks, and much worse."[1]

—A young man speaking at a national conference about his experience in high school

STRENGTHENING THE SAFETY NET

www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm

How schools can help youth with emotional and behavioral needs complete their high school education and prepare for life after school

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PROJECTS AT A GLANCE

STRATEGIES:	**Supportive Schools** University of Kansas pg. 6	**Project SERVE** University of Oregon pg. 8	**Amazing Discoveries** University of Arizona pg. 10	**Mentor/Advisor Project** University of Vermont pg. 12	**Check & Connect** University of Minnesota pg.14	**Laulima Lokahi** University of Hawai'i pg. 16	**Community Transition Program** University of Oregon pg. 18
Relationship Building	X			X	X		
Social Skills Training	X	X	X	X	X		X
Academic/Vocational Training	X	X				X	X
Student Goal Setting	X	X		X	X	X	X
Other Agencies		X				X	X
Family Involvement	X			X	X	X	
Community Partnerships		X		X	X	X	X

COMMUNITY SETTINGS:							
Urban Community (U) Suburban Community (S) Rural Community (R)	S	S,R	U,S,R	S,R	U	S,R	S

SCHOOL SETTINGS:							
Middle School (M) High School (H) Alternative Setting (A)	M,H,A	A	M	H	H,A	H	H,A

For more information about the projects described in this book, see our website at: **http://www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm** or contact the persons listed below.

Supportive Schools: www.ku-crl.org
University of Kansas Center on Research and Learning, 517 J.R. Pearson Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045

Project SERVE: Mike Bullis, University of Oregon, 175 College of Education, 5260 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97503-5260 bullism@oregon.edu

Amazing Discoveries: Developed by Tanis Bryan and James Bryan, University of Arizona, Order from: Exceptional Innovations, PO Box 6085, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Phone: 419-536-8560

Mentor/Advisor Project: Julie Welkowitz, University of Vermont Center on Disability & Community Inclusion, 5 Burlington Square, Burlington, VT 05405 jwelkowi@zoo.uvm.edu

Check & Connect: Mary Sinclair, Institute of Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, 111 Pattee Hall, Minneapolis, MN 55455 sincl001@maroon.tc.umn.edu

Laulima Lokahi: Jacki Rhuman, University Affiliated Program University of Hawai'i, 1776 University Avenue, UA4-6, Honolulu, HI 96822 rhuman@hawaii.edu

Community Transition Program: Mike Benz, University of Oregon, 175 College of Education, 5260 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97503-5260 mbenz@oregon.uoregon.edu

[1] (*cover*) Osher, D. (1996). Strengths-based foundations of hope. *Reaching Today's Youth*, 1(1), 26-29.

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WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE CHALLENGE

Youth with emotional and behavioral problems are among the most challenging groups of students to educate. Some students with emotional and behavioral problems are eligible for special education services, but many do not receive specialized services in schools, even though they lack the necessary behavioral skills to participate appropriately in class.

Knowing that high school often provides the last safety net, school administrators struggle to shepherd youth at risk into a successful adulthood. The task is difficult, for schools are faced with limited resources and confounding public scrutiny. Prevention measures to help these students may be considered too time-consuming and costly. However, the cost to society is far higher when schools and communities fail to improve the adaptive behaviors of this growing population. In 1991, the Joint Economic Committee estimated that providing for dropouts and their families cost each taxpayer more than $800 annually. If these youth receive education and services that meet their unique needs, they are much more likely to become productive, self-reliant adults.

Given the overwhelming social problems many youth face in their daily lives, it comes as no surprise that some feel alone, angry, and forgotten. Their alienation from society and school has often been blamed for recent random violence in our nation's schools. A school community which lets youth know they are cared for is the bedrock of a comprehensive violence prevention plan. To create a caring environment for all youth, schools and human service agencies are building structures which make personal connections a part of their daily mission. These strategies offer a vision of how schools and communities can work together to create an environment that gives our young people positive social, academic and vocational tools so that they don't believe they have to be violent to get noticed.

This publication was developed through a nationwide collaboration among school administrators and researchers. Each of these initiatives experienced successes and failures, and learned valuable lessons in the process. There are no easy answers for effectively serving at-risk students, but there are strategies that can maximize their chances of school success. This guide offers research-based strategies to educate students with behavioral problems by maximizing resources already present in the community. These researchers, administrators, and students candidly share their stories so that others can learn from their experiences.

"Issues surrounding students with emotional/behavioral problems really tear at the fabric of people's value systems. They carry a feeling that when people are 'bad,' they should be punished. . . All I know for sure is that if we think we're going to solve the problem with punishment, we know we're not going to get anywhere."

—Middle School Principal

THE NEEDS OF THE DEVELOPING STUDENT

To develop into healthy adults, youth need:

- Academic, social, and vocational skills
- A community that fosters personal supportive relationships
- A safety net that responds meaningfully to individual needs
- Meaningful goals

The groundbreaking work of Urie Bronfenbrenner[2] informs us that human development and behavior are the result of an individual's interaction with surrounding environments. Thus, punitive discipline alone may reinforce a youth's perception of other people as typically hostile, feeding a tendency toward an aggressive or defensive response. In fact, traditional measures often exacerbate behavior problems. For example, a student who has trouble with an assignment might unconsciously act out in order to be removed from class. Removing him only shows him that he has an easy escape system.

Acting out is not the only expression of emotional/behavioral problems. Some youth may suffer from such debilitating depression or anxiety that school engagement is next to impossible for them. Students with internalizing symptoms of distress need attention from educators, human service agencies, families, and administrators just as much as peers with externalizing behaviors. Most often, youth with emotional and behavioral problems have both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Because of the complexity of their challenges, effective supports are tailored to the individual needs of each student at risk.

Even though strategies are different for different types of problems, the initiatives described in this publication are based on the premise that all young adults share some basic human needs: skills for life that allow competence; supportive, personal relationships with peers and adults; a system of support to which they can turn in times of need; and meaningful, personal goals which are supported by adults in their lives. Research has shown that the development of life skills, fostered by the presence of an adult who offers encouragement, caring and praise for successes, is critical in helping a child

[2] Bronfenbrenner, Urie. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

succeed in the face of adversity. Adolescents also have a deep need for acceptance from peers, and tend to thrive on goals which they determine themselves, based on their own interests and needs.

Basic social needs often go unmet for students with emotional and behavioral problems because they may have difficulty forming personal ties, and may behave in a way that discourages others from reaching out to them. Nonetheless, relationships with socially competent people are a vital part of helping youth learn socially adept behaviors. To overcome this barrier, schools can create structures which encourage personal ties among young people and caring adults. These relationships begin to offer support that motivates and empowers youth to overcome the challenges they experience in their lives.

Students with emotional and behavioral problems often need services beyond academic and guidance support. Because school personnel are familiar with the unique needs of each student, schools often become the focal point for human services. With specific structures in place, schools can respond to these needs on an individual basis, more efficiently channeling resources.[3]

The key to individualized intervention is collaboration among people in key settings that fosters an understanding of the student as an individual. When families, school professionals, and human service providers seek solutions together, student outcomes greatly improve. This requires new mechanisms for school administrators, social service agencies, and families to work together.

The projects described in this publication all form new connections; preparing students for transitions by teaching them life skills, fostering personal relations among students and adults, and strengthening relationships with other social service organizations. Almost every project combined several of these strategies to create a multi-pronged approach (see table, page 2). To illustrate each strategy, only one component from each project is described in this publication, but thorough project descriptions are available on our website at www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm. Indeed, any effort to support this challenging population with a single approach is bound to fail. All youth need academic support, social skills, and vocational preparation that support their personal life goals. All youth need relationships with peers and adults. All youth need individually coordinated human service plans that meet their needs when their lives are in crisis. Every school needs a system of self-evaluation and improvement which examines how well it meets the needs of the entire student population. Though these needs and provisions are complex, every project demonstrates that the task of strengthening the safety net for adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems, though challenging, is extremely rewarding.

"With such a large school population it's a real balancing act between offering extra things for the most at-risk students while still meeting the needs of the total school population."

—High School Vice Principal

[3] Flaherty, L.T., & Weist, M.D., & Warner, B.S. (1996). School-based mental health services in the United States: History, current models and needs. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 32, 341-352.

"There is a connection between curriculum and behavior. Kids that are sucessful in class seem to have fewer behavioral incidents in our work here."

—Special Education Coordinator

FOCUS ON STUDENT SKILLS

Components of SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS include:

- Relationship Building
- Social Skills Training
- **Academic Training**
- Student Goal Setting
- Family Involvement

Other Projects that use the strategy of ACADEMIC TRAINING are:

- Project SERVE
- Laulima Lokahi
- Community Transition Program

Some students may have behavioral problems simply because they lack the necessary skills to navigate the school environment successfully. A student with an explosive temper may lack the self-awareness or communication skills to express needs appropriately. A student who has poor cognitive skills may act out to hide embarrassment at not being able to keep up with peers. The situation often worsens once students leave high school, and those receiving special education services for emotional and behavioral challenges historically have less success than peers with other types of disabilities.[4] Too often, students with emotional issues enter the work force ill prepared for the behavior expectations of employers. Because of their struggles in the traditional school environment, few leave high school with marketable skills needed to gain and retain employment.

One way to help students overcome behavioral challenges is to teach them coping skills. When students are given the opportunity to develop social, academic, and vocational competence, their post-school outcomes can improve tremendously. Schools can help students with emotional problems learn strategies for completing school work, communicating their feelings and needs, and finding gainful employment after leaving high school.

ACADEMIC TRAINING: SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS MODEL, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Students with emotional and behavioral challenges often have difficulty completing their school work. They need simple "plans," or sets of behaviors, for completing complex tasks. The Supportive Schools Model involves teaching "Learning Strategies" that help students break down academic tasks into smaller steps that are not so daunting. First, students are tested to determine their current learning habits and needs. Teachers who

[4] Marder, C. (1992). *Secondary students classified as seriously emotionally disturbed: How are they being served?* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

are specially trained in the *Learning Strategies Curriculum* explain the strategies to students, describing the steps in each strategy. Then, using examples of academic lessons, teachers "think aloud" in front of students, modeling the mental process involved in each learning strategy. Students practice listing steps and describing the strategy with the teachers. Then students practice the strategy in lessons designed with increasing complexity to build confidence and fluency in performing the strategy steps. When they are ready, students apply learning strategies to regular class content. They are assessed according to their mastery of each strategy it in a variety of settings. Finally, students learn to generalize the strategy in the real world.

Technical assistance for the *Learning Strategies Curriculum* is available from the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. There are many trainers nationwide who can prepare school staff to use and teach it. Schools can choose for themselves how central to make Learning Strategies. Some schools have a Learning Strategies Class for students who could benefit from it, some train a few teachers trained to administer the curriculum, and some have all their teachers teach Learning Strategies so that all students are exposed to the concepts and practice. Learning Strategies Instruction is flexible enough to suit the needs of most educational contexts.

For more information about Supportive Schools, see the website at www.kucrl.org.

SAMANTHA'S STORY: SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Samantha was a quiet young woman who was given to daydreaming in class. Having come from a very large family with two working parents, Samantha had learned early on to escape from difficult situations by tuning out. Although imaginative and creative, she often had trouble focusing on her class work. In history class, Samantha had trouble with her reading comprehension. She would often come to class having read her assignment, but could remember none of the content in the lesson. Her history teacher, who was trained in the Strategic Instruction Model, believed Samantha when she told her she had read the lesson but couldn't remember it. Working with her individually, the teacher went over the steps of Visual Imagery, a strategy that would help Samantha use her active imagination to visualize, comprehend, and remember reading material.

First, the teacher explained the steps of a strategy of visualizing what Samantha read.

Then the teacher read a passage aloud, and modeled how to use the steps for visualizing the material by describing her mental picture of the material to Samantha.

Next, Samatha memorized the steps involved with the Visual Imagery Strategy so that she could recite them from memory.

She then practiced using the strategy with the help of the teacher, visualizing reading passages and describing what she saw.

Finally, Samantha was encouraged to generalize what she learned from the Visual Imagery Strategy so that she could use it on her own in other subject areas without prompting from her teacher.

Prepared for Supportive Schools by Jan Bulgren, Jean Schumaker, and Amy Ryan.

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Components of Project SERVE include:

- **Academic/Vocational Training**
- Student Goal Setting
- Involvement of Other Agencies
- Family Involvement
- Community Partnerships

Another Project that uses the strategy of VOCATIONAL TRAINING is:

- Community Transition Program

VOCATIONAL TRAINING: PROJECT SERVE, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Project SERVE uses jobs to "hook" youth into positive behaviors. Work is viewed as a therapeutic setting which offers participants structure, positive experiences, and opportunities to create goals for their future beyond high school. SERVE gives youth support to greatly increase their ability to meet employers' expectations for behavior and skills once they leave high school and enter the work force as adults. Receiving praise for a job well done and being paid for honest work often helps students form a new perspective on themselves and other people. The relationship between education level and amount of wages earned quickly becomes clear to many participants. Typically, about 60% of SERVE participants complete high school or the equivalent. SERVE secures paid, competitive employment for roughly 60% of participants and reduces unsuccessful terminations to less than 30%. These results are noteworthy, as national data indicate that less than 40% of these youth will have work experiences and almost 90% of jobs end unsuccessfully for young people with behavioral issues.[5]

An intake assessment provides information about a youth's history, an impression of who the youth is, and what occupation he or she would like to try. Any important information, such as a history of criminal activity, is also important so that a Transition Specialist knows the potential risks of placing students in community settings. Once a picture of the youth's social and emotional stability is drawn, the Transition Specialist learns about the youth's goals by asking about his or her plans for the future.

SERVE discovered that students often do much better when they are given many different jobs – a better use of time and resources – than trying to support them in developing a long-term professional choice. Variety in work leads to a clearer picture of what a youth might enjoy as a career. Most youth stay with SERVE for 10-12 months and during that time work at 3-4 different jobs. Before placement, all youths receive training in interview skills, either by role-playing with their own Transition Specialist or doing mock interviews with another Transition Specialist they don't know very well. The youth receive constructive feedback about their answers to interview questions, and practice until they are able to answer prospective employers' questions honestly and positively. SERVE encourages youth to explore their options, and if they discover they do not like a job, they are taught the appropriate way to leave and move on to another. *To learn more about SERVE, visit our website at www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm.*

[5] Valdes, K., Williamson, C., & Wagner, M. (1990). *The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students: Vol. 3. Youth categorized as emotionally disturbed.* Palo Alto, CA: SRI International.
D'Amico,R., & Blackorby, J. (1992). Trends in employment among out-of-school youth with disabilities. In M. Wagner, R. D'Amico, C. Marder, L. Newman, & J. Blackorby (Eds.), *What happens next? Trends in postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities.* Menlo Park: SRI International.

PHILIP'S STORY: PROJECT SERVE

Philip was an articulate, intelligent young man with Attention Deficit Disorder, who had a lot of trouble staying organized enough to function well at school, especially when he forgot to take his medication. Philip's Transition Specialist performed an intake assessment. During these initial interviews, Philip shared that he enjoyed working with elderly people. To determine his interests in the working world, Philip filled out an assessment called Career Decision Maker.[6] His Transition Specialist looked into employment opportunities in the community at various adult care facilities, and found an opening. Together, Philip and his Transition Specialist practiced interviewing skills, role-playing with Philip what he would say to his prospective employer. The practice paid off, and Philip was given a part-time, after school job as a janitor and dishwasher.

Not surprisingly, Philip had the same difficulties as a dishwasher that he had at school. Philip attacked tasks with little forethought so that he made more work for himself. For example, Philip began his shift by mopping a clean floor, after which he washed dishes, dirtying the floor so that he had to mop again. His boss repeatedly had to correct him. Constantly behind, Philip often skipped breaks and forgot to take his medication, which only made matters worse. To help, Philip's Transition Specialist met with Philip and his supervisor to make a checklist of the tasks Philip needed to complete during his shift, in a logical order. When Philip finished one task, he checked it off and moved on to the next task. This helped Philip stay organized. A break was included in the checklist, which reminded Philip to relax and take his medication. The checklist was a very powerful tool that helped Philip overcome the challenges of completing linear tasks logically. Soon, he learned to use checklists for other areas of his life, so that his performance in school also improved.

The checklist was a very powerful tool that helped Philip overcome his challenges in completing linear tasks logically. Soon, he learned to use checklists for other areas of his life, so that his performance in school also improved.

Prepared for Project Serve by Mike Bullis.

[6] Harrington, T.F., & O'Shea, A. (1983). Vocational Self-Concepts – A Stratified U.S. Sample, Grades 7-13. Eric number ED237837.

The AMAZING DISCOVERIES CURRICULUM covers:

- Basic Principles in Doing Science
- Thoughts and Feelings Influence Our Behavior
- How People Influence Each Other
- Other People Influence Our Behavior

Other Projects that use the strategy of SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING are:

- Supportive Schools
- Mentor/Advisor Project
- Check & Connect
- Community Transition Program

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING: AMAZING DISCOVERIES, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Amazing Discoveries is an innovative, structured curriculum which embeds social skills lessons into hands-on experiments about human behavior. These lessons are a way for all students, including those with emotional and behavioral problems, to learn how to process social information they receive from peers and adults. *Amazing Discoveries* lessons also emphasize problem solving and critical thinking in science, social studies, and math. Often, *Amazing Discoveries* is applied in lessons about current events, and taught by an interdisciplinary team of teachers. For example, the science or social studies teacher introduces the lesson, a math teacher follows with the analysis of the data, and the language arts teacher leads the write-up of the experiment.

To order the Amazing Discoveries curriculum and obtain more information, visit the website at www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm.

JACOB'S STORY: AMAZING DISCOVERIES

Jacob was a slight young man who had a wry sense of humor and often played the role of class clown. He sometimes made sarcastic, personal attacks on his teachers and other students. This behavior often disrupted class and frequently resulted in disciplinary referrals. For this reason, he had trouble making and keeping friends in school, a problem which exacerbated the feelings of loneliness and upheaval he experienced living in foster care.

During an *Amazing Discoveries* lesson titled, "Does Everyone See the Same Thing?" Jacob and the other students were asked to watch a short segment of a television show, such as *Home Improvement*. As they watched, students kept track of the number of put-downs they heard. At the end of the segment, the students reported the total number of put-downs they perceived from the characters. As is often the case, there were wide variations in what the youth perceived as insulting. The lesson demonstrated that scientists have to be careful to define the behavior or factor they are researching or the results of their research can be meaningless. The social lesson was that conflict often arises when people have different ideas about what kinds of comments are put downs. This helped Jacob understand that sometimes he was hurting those around him without meaning to.

After this lesson, his teacher noticed that Jacob started apologizing when his funny comments seemed to hurt others' feelings. She also noticed that the other students would recall the lesson when letting Jacob know that his jokes were hurtful. After a while, Jacob began using his great sense of humor in less hurtful ways and seemed to become a more engaged member of the class.

Prepared for Amazing Discoveries by Tanis Bryan and Amy Ryan.

RELATIONSHIPS: CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH SCHOOL

"How do we start to think about developing relationships as one of the main things we need to do at schools, rather than something that just sort of happens, and is nice when it does?"

—High School Principal

Students who feel socially connected and accepted at school are more likely to graduate than students who feel isolated or rejected.[7] Everyone needs to feel accepted, but students with emotional and behavioral problems often have trouble fitting in with peers and may challenge adults in ways that break down opportunities to develop personal ties. Regardless, it is especially important for young adults with emotional and behavioral problems to connect on a personal level with adults who care about their success in school, and with peers who can model appropriate behavior. There is no substitute for genuine, caring relationships as a support for overcoming adversity. When students with emotional disorders recognize that they are part of a community, they can change their views of themselves, their school, and their future. To help students with emotional disorders overcome their difficulty in creating personal ties with socially competent peers and adults, an effective strategy is to create conditions that encourage these young people to bond with others on a personal level.

[7] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Alienation and the four worlds of childhood. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67, 430-436.
Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationship to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13 (1), 21-43.

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Mentor/Advisor components include:

- **Relationship Building with Peers and Adults**
- Social Skills Training
- Student Goal Setting
- Family Involvement
- Community Partnerships

Other Projects that use the strategy of RELATIONSHIP BUILDING are:

- Supportive Schools
- Check & Connect

CONNECTING WITH PEERS: MENTOR/ADVISOR PROJECT, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

The Mentor/Advisor Project brings groups of 5-8 students together with an adult mentor to create a caring environment in which students can develop relationships. Youth practice skills such as communication, collaboration, problem solving, and conflict resolution through applied activities, including community service learning and personal learning plans. Mentors are school staff members (i.e., regular educators, special educators, guidance, related service personnel) who facilitate mentor groups and serve as advocates for the students in their group.

Administrators create an even mix of socially competent and socially challenged students in each mentor group. Because participation is voluntary, it is important to reduce the possible stigma of a special education program. In addition, students with healthy coping and social skills are able to model appropriate social behavior for students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Group heterogeneity enables students to become friends with others that they "wouldn't normally be friends with." This sense of belonging is particularly significant for students who have few, if any, friends.

Mentor groups use a collaborative teaming framework. Students rotate taking roles, such as facilitator, recorder, time-keeper, process observer. Each meeting begins with a brief check-in time during which students talk about how they are doing. Often, during check-in, serious personal problems surface, resulting in a referral to guidance or other human services. It is important for mentors to have someone they can turn to for advice about helping with students' emotional issues. The last 5 minutes of the mentor class is "process time," during which the group reviews how well they work together. Students speak to the importance of being able to run their own groups and learning skills in collaborative leadership. As one student stated, "Leadership? I think it's more communication. For a leader to be a good leader, they have to be able to communicate their ideas well and understand others' ideas too. And it's helped me a lot with that."

For the first few weeks of meetings, students participate in team-building activities to develop trust and learn to work cooperatively. Students continue to practice skills in collaboration and problem solving through their implementation of community service learning (CSL) activities. These CSL projects enable students to form connections with members of their community. As one student described her experience, "I liked working on community projects, helping others, feeling that even though we're teenagers, we care." Relationships with community members are also formed through individual projects wherein students are paired with someone from the community to explore an area of interest. The project fosters relationships between families and the school as well, through ongoing promotion of family participation in project related activities.

For more information about the Mentor/ Advisor Project, visit our website at www.air.org/cecp.safetynet.htm.

JIM'S STORY: THE MENTOR/ADVISOR PROJECT

Throughout Jim's school career, his foster mother, Jean, was constantly being called to the school because of his frequent tantrums, physical aggression, and non-compliance. In high school, Jim was encouraged to volunteer for a mentor group of eight other students and one mentor, who was a regular classroom teacher. Four students in the group experienced behavioral and/or learning difficulties, while the others were more "typically" performing students. At first Jim was extremely withdrawn from the group. When he did participate, he displayed immature behaviors like writing inappropriate statements on the board, making fun of others, continually tapping his pencil, and generally disrupting the group process. Because the groups were collaboratively run, Jim was asked to try different roles, like timekeeper, recorder, facilitator, or observer. Although he dreaded being the facilitator, Jim finally agreed to try out some of these roles, with the encouragement and modeling of his mentor. The first four weeks of the class were focused predominantly on team-building activities. During that time, Jim remained distant from his peers.

Once the group began community service, a new side of Jim emerged. He became increasingly active in generating ideas for projects and became one of the members who most reliably followed through on activities. Within a few months, he was sitting at the same table with his classmates, demonstrating considerable problem-solving skills. Jim's classmates showed increasing respect for him. Gradually, Jim became more connected to the other students in the group and more interested in helping others. These changes generalized to other areas of his life and led to improvement in his academic performance. In a recent interview with his foster mother, Jean shared, "Last year in algebra Jim did excellent – straight A's all year. He was helping the other kids. Prior to this, he would never have done it, never. And I think it's been the mentorship class that helped him grow this much." Jim's academics and behavior improved so much that he became ineligible for special education, but services were maintained through a Section 504 plan. In contrast to the scared boy who was once dragged from the school screaming and kicking, Jim is now reaching out to help others, becoming a positive contributing force within his community.

In contrast to the scared boy who was once dragged from the school screaming and kicking, Jim is now reaching out to help others, becoming a positive contributing force within his community.

Prepared for the Mentor/Advisor Project by Julie Welkowitz.

Check & Connect components include:

- **Relationship Building**
- Social Skill Training
- Student Goal Setting
- Family Involvement
- Community Partnerships

Other projects that use the strategy of RELATIONSHIP BUILDING are:

- Supportive Schools
- Mentor/Advisor Project
- Check & Connect

PROMOTING STUDENT PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE PERSISTENCE OF A CARING ADULT: CHECK & CONNECT, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Check & Connect is a model designed to promote students' engagement with school through the connection with a persistent and caring adult focused on the child's educational success. The model was originally developed for middle school students with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities. Recently, Check & Connect was piloted for urban high school students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, beginning in ninth grade and continuing on for four years.

Check & Connect is driven by a person called a "monitor," sometimes referred to as a Check & Connect "worker." The role of the monitor is modeled after a commonly identified protective factor in resiliency literature – the presence of an adult in the child's life to fuel the motivation and foster the development of life skills needed to overcome obstacles. The monitor's primary goal is to promote regular school participation and to keep education a salient issue for students, parents, and teachers. Students must first be in school, attending regularly, in order to benefit from instruction and innovative enrichment programs. The role of the monitor can be characterized as a cross between a mentor, advocate, and service coordinator. The monitors work with caseloads of students and families over time (years) and more important, follow their caseloads from building to building, program to program. The program is purposefully structured to maximize personal contact and opportunities to build trusting relationships. One of the students described the role of the monitor as "the person who stays on my back about coming to school." The monitors' interactions with students, parents, educators, and others are guided by the check and connect components of the model.

The "check" part of the model makes use of existing school data to assess the extent to which students are engaged in school or, conversely, are showing signs of withdrawal. Engagement is measured according to several indicators that are within the power of educators and parents to change, such as attendance (skipping classes), social/behavioral performance (out-of-school suspension, other disciplinary consequences such as behavior referrals, detention, in-school suspension), and academic performance (course failures, accrual of credits).

The "connect" part of the model is the intervention. All students targeted for the program, regardless of their immediate level of engagement, receive "basic" intervention services. Basic intervention is essentially a monthly conversation between the monitor and student using a cognitive-behavioral problem-solving approach. The conversation focuses on current school performance, the economics of staying in school, and real or hypothetical barriers to school success. For those youth who show signs of withdrawal, additional "intensive" intervention strategies are implemented (for about 70% of a monitor's caseload at any given time), characterized more by the intensity of support than by the type of support. The

type of intensive intervention is based on the individual needs of the student and accessibility of resources. For example, if a student is having trouble waking in time for class, the monitor might talk with the parent about the youth's need for sleep, make wake-up calls for a week, or give the student a ride to school, with the overall goal of getting the student back in the habit of meeting the bus on time. The trust and mutual respect that develops between the monitor and student and the monitor's ability to work with youth in the community increased students' commitment to other programs. Students who had the support of a caring monitor were finally able to follow through with initiatives that other staff, tied to a school building, had tried unsuccessfully in the past.

For more information about Check & Connect, visit our website at www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm.

LAKEESHA'S STORY: CHECK & CONNECT

When I introduced myself to fifteen year old Lakeesha as her Monitor from the Check & Connect Project, she seemed a very angry young woman. She had a combative attitude toward most authority figures. When she did not understand class lessons, she became disruptive. She felt alone in her struggle with her lack of reading skills. Lakeesha could be hostile to other students and got into verbal and physical fights. A fight with another student led to an expulsion for Lakeesha. I set up a meeting with district personnel, Lakeesha, and her parents to discuss the expulsion. The meeting revealed that the school was out of compliance in administering the expulsion and Lakeesha was readmitted. I made it clear to her that she had received her last "get out of jail free card" and no more suspensions were to occur.

Lakeesha received no more suspensions. The program helped her learn to communicate her feelings in a non-combative manner. She learned, with coaching, how to advocate for herself in conversations I facilitated between herself and her teachers. I introduced her to school staff who could help her achieve her goals, such as the career counselor, the school counselor, and Urban League staff. Over time, many adults in her life clearly saw a change in Lakeesha's attitude and the way she communicated. For instance, Lakeesha had difficulty with her work supervisor at a day care center. Rather than exploding in anger, she set up a meeting between the center director, herself, and the supervisor where she expressed her feelings. The situation was eventually resolved. Despite occasional conflicts with teachers, Lakeesha is putting the necessary effort into learning. She completed her school work despite the extra effort her reading level required of her. I rewarded her progress with simple praise for her hard work, and by going on outings together on special occasions.

Lakeesha continues on track to graduate from high school next year. Her goal is to study cosmetology and to open her own business. She attends her IEP meetings and is vocal about her needs and concerns. In past years, her teachers had been doubtful about her college aspirations, but now they encourage her. Her case manager even recommended Lakeesha for the honor of talking with a state senator. Lakeesha relished the opportunity and spoke to the senator about her experiences in high school.

Prepared for Check & Connect by Melissa Kau, Deborah Westberry, Mary Sinclair, & Christine Hurley.

"I think part of our problem is the timeliness of being able to get mental health services to act in crisis situations. It's sometimes a problem with social services. It's a matter of students being too close to the age of 16. Their attitude is, 'We really wouldn't be able to do much beyond that age anyway, so why spend tons of money to intervene?' It really does tie our hands a lot of the time."

—High School Principal

WEAVING THE SAFETY NET: FORGING TIES WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Too often, schools are isolated from community resources. Every town has intelligent, creative people in it who care deeply about students at risk, and would help if they were given the chance. Valuable school partners such as parents, community leaders, education experts, and social service agencies can offer a fresh perspective on effectively serving students at risk. Regular communication among schools and agencies can break down institutional barriers. Schools are collaborating with social service agencies to deliver individualized plans for each student. This process is easier if schools create institutional structures with one or more social service agencies, and with community partners.[8]

LAULIMA LOKAHI components include:

- Academic Training
- Student Goal Setting
- Involvement of Other Agencies
- Family Involvement
- **Community Partnerships**

Other Projects that have community partnerships:

- Project SERVE
- Mentor/Advisor Project
- Check & Connect
- Community Transition Program

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT : LAULIMA LOKAHI, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

Laulima Lokahi (Pulling Together) creates two types of teams. First, Individual Student Support Teams are formed around single students to help them meet their own educational and post-school goals. Second, a knowledgeable Critical Friend helps school staff create a School-Wide System Improvement Team that facilitates constant self-evaluation and improvement. The School-Wide System Improvement Team includes anyone committed to school reform. Members are parents, teachers, administrators, and members of social service agencies who collaborate with the school regularly. Quite often, the most effective members are people who have been "squeaky wheels" and have demonstrated compe-

[8] Flaherty, L.T., Weist, J.D., & Warner, B.S. (1996). School-based mental health services in the United States: History, current models and needs. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 32, 341-352.

[9] Senge, P. (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. New York: Doubleday.
Senge, P. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook : Strategies and tools for building a learning organization*. New York: Currency/Doubleday.

BRIAN'S STORY: LAULIMA LOKAHI

Brian was a dynamic young man who sometimes exploded in anger at peers and teachers. As his facilitator worked with him to set goals, it became clear that Brian's fondest wish was to join the football team. Brian's Youth Support Team, which included his father, some key teachers, and the school counselor, knew that in order to be eligible for the team, he needed to improve his grades and learn how to control his temper. To support him in his goal, his teachers agreed to set up tutoring sessions with him. His father agreed to make certain Brian conscientiously completed his homework every night, and the school counselor worked with him to develop a plan for how he could control his temper. With his longed-for goal in mind, Brian had the incentive and energy to improve all aspects of his participation in school. Within a few months, his grades improved, and his angry incidents were so seldom that he could join the football team.

The facilitator noticed in this process that other students, some of whom also had Youth Support Teams, were in danger of being dropped from athletic teams because of their grades. This issue was brought before the School-Wide System Improvement Team. After gathering information from all Youth Support Teams about this issue, the School-Wide System Improvement Team held a meeting with all faculty who were involved with extra curricular activities. The Critical Friend, a researcher from the local University, helped this group develop a practical strategy which would enable them to systematically offer support to students whose grades were suffering. Coaches and Faculty Club Sponsors now receive brief notes from academic teachers when students' grades appear to be slipping and are invited to Youth Support Team meetings to problem solve with the students before their grades lead to crisis. This new system has helped decrease team and club attrition, and keeps academics a salient matter for students who want to remain involved in their extra curricular activities.

Prepared for Laulima Lokahi by Jacki Rhuman and Amy Ryan.

Brian kept a card in his pocket with these steps written on it so that he could pull it out and remind himself how to control his temper and avoid a fight.

tence in a proactive critique of the school system. The process this team uses draws from the ideas of Peter Senge.[9]

The School Wide System Improvement Team needs the perspective of a Critical Friend who can objectively guide the school staff in a continual evaluation of the school's functioning. The perspective of school personnel is often limited by the specialized role they play within the system. Furthermore, because school staff and administrators are continually challenged by crises, there is seldom the time to evaluate the delivery of services. For these teams to be effective, they need a Critical Friend, someone who can make observations free from worrying whether a contribution might be politically problematic.

Regular communication between the

School-Wide System Improvement Team and each of the Individual Student Support Teams is crucial to the school's self-reflection and improvement process. Student Support Teams gain a wealth of information about how and why some students fall through the cracks. This knowledge informs the process of improving how the school interacts with exceptional students. The School-Wide System Improvement Team meets once per week to look at each Individual Student Support Teams' notes and record their observations. On a quarterly basis, they evaluate meeting notes and review recorded observations to discover where improvements are needed in the system. At each quarterly meeting, the team answers four questions.

1. How can we improve planning and team building?
2. How can we improve professional development needed to perform the Individual Student Support process well?
3. How can we coordinate resources to better serve students and their families?
4. How can the school document its own processes and better evaluate them?

The School-Wide Team then plans how to implement needed changes. Solutions to these issues often include professional development for teachers, changes in ways school staff communicate with each other and parents, and the formation of closer ties between the school and other human service agencies.

COMMUNITY TRANSITION PROGRAM (CTP) components include:

- Social Skills Training
- Vocational Training
- Student Goal Setting
- **Involvement of Social Service Agencies**
- Community Partnerships

Other projects that form institutional ties with social service agencies:

- Project SERVE
- Laulima Lokahi

SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COLLABORATION: COMMUNITY TRANSITION PROGRAM (CTP), UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Every student receiving Special Education Services receives help from Community Transition Program, as do youth who appear to be on the verge of dropping out of school or who have already dropped out of school. Most youth also work individually with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who provide services and expertise beyond what the school district alone can offer. A youth's involvement with the CTP begins with an assessment. The Transition Specialist works with the students to gather information needed to develop individual transition plans. In each area of the student's life, namely finance, vocational skills, personal skills, and independent living skills, Transition Specialists and students identify strengths, hopes, and dreams for the future, and barriers confronted. This process allows students to develop a realistic and positive vision of their adulthood that includes how and where they will live, how they will earn money, and how they will interact with the people in their lives.[10]

The Transition Specialist uses this process to develop concrete goals for students' academic lives, independent living situations, employment future, and personal/social lives. These ideas are trans-

[10] Mount, B., & Zwernik, K. (1990). *Making futures happen: A manual for facilitators of personal futures planning*. Eric number ED363077.

lated into an action plan for working toward each of these goals, with concrete steps to overcome obstacles and make students' dreams a reality. Very often, a case manager from the local Vocational Rehabilitation agency is involved in the individual planning process, providing the resources and expertise needed to support students' plans, whether this means individual driving instruction, or paying for special job training.

Transition Specialists work with youth exiting the program to find a stable, long-term placement, either in competitive employment, or in a post-secondary education program. Each final placement is individually designed and often incorporates continuing education elements with work placements appropriate to long-term goals. If the youth still shows signs of needing support but has reached the age of 22 and is no longer eligible for services from the school district, the final placement connects him or her with an appropriate agency.

For more information about the Community Transition Program, visit our website at www.air.org/ccp/safetynet.htm.

JARED'S STORY: COMMUNITY TRANSITION PROGRAM

Jared, who had been diagnosed with emotional disorders since middle school, was a tall, energetic 16-year-old who liked to talk and joke. He dropped out of high school to enter a high school completion program but began abusing alcohol, and went to a residential treatment facility to cope with his addiction. When he was released, he entered the Community Transition Program. Jared stated that his career goal was to join the military. His Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor noted in Jared's case files that this "may be an unrealistic avenue for him to pursue." His CTP Transition Specialist and VR Counselor helped Jared develop a transition plan that included employment, continuing education, job training, getting a driver's license, and counseling.

Instead of returning him to high school, the Teacher Coordinator found Jared a job at a grocery store. He explained, "Schools tend to reintegrate people into the same old environment... put them back into the same old role. You don't do that. You use the community." Since a high school diploma was necessary to apply to the military, Jared re-enrolled in the high school completion program. Six months after returning to the community, Jared became the first student from his school district with E/BD to graduate from the completion program.

While Jared was attending classes and working, he attended a local, professional driving school, paid for by VR. Jared's experience helped CTP staff "understand the importance of driving lessons as a transition-to-adult need." Jared completed his lessons and secured his driving license.

To complete his goals in CTP, Jared applied and was accepted into the U.S. Marines. In May of what would have been his senior year in high school, Jared started basic training. He completed boot camp and attended advanced training in the Marine Corp where he is successfully completing a tour of duty. After his military obligation is completed, Jared is planning a career as a firefighter.

Prepared for the Community Transition Program by Mike Benz.

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CONCLUSION

This publication is not an exhaustive survey of all possible approaches to the education and support of young people with emotional/behavioral problems. Each project, made possible by funding provided by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, represents ongoing research into issues and techniques. All of these strategies are supported by data, with specific information on effectiveness located, when available, on our website at www.air.org/cecp/safetynet.htm. However, the elements in each project draw upon decades of research, and each project combines several different elements to create a multi-pronged approach to services students need to thrive. No single strategy described in this summary is sufficient, and the best support for students with special behavioral and emotional needs is one that incorporates several. For example, the most effective school will offer (a) academic, vocational, and social skills instruction, (b) relationship building, (c) coordination of services with other social service agencies, and (d) a system of self-evaluation and improvement. When you provide only one strand in the safety net, you end up with a tightrope. There are enough strands of support available in most communities, but in order to weave a safety net, they must be coordinated to work together. Schools know and care about their students as individuals with unique needs and concerns. Administrators are the key to strengthening the safety net for students who are at risk.

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